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AUTHOR Hutchison, Javeria F.
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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of "preferred interest" materials in adult reading classes was tested by comparing pretest and posttest scores for the silent reading subtest of the Standard Reading Inventory. The study collected data for 20 adults that received reading instruction by traditional teaching methods (large group arrangement and commercial texts/kits) and for 20 adults that received individualized instruction, during which the teacher developed materials and activities that matched the students' reading and learning preferences. (All subjects had been classified previously as reading below the fourth grade levels.) Pretest and posttest mean scores for silent reading comprehension indicate greater reading achievement for the preferred interest group. Analysis of variance between groups was significant at the .05 level, indicating that students using interest oriented materials recalled information and interpreted word meanings in context better than did students in the traditional instructional setting. (RL)

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Laveria F. Hutchison
Assistant Professor
Curriculum & Instruction
University of Houston
Central Campus
Houston, Texas 77004

PREFERRED INTERESTS AS AN AID IN TEACHING FUNCTIONALLY ILLITERATE ADULTS TO READ

Laveria F. Hutchison[a]
University of Houston--Central Campus

INTRODUCTION

The functionally illiterate adult, who manifest severely limited basic reading skills, constitutes a concern common to today's educators as well as laymen, who realize that adults cannot fulfill and appreciate societal potentialities unless these adults master effective reading skills. However, professional efforts to develop techniques and materials which would eliminate or substantially reduce the number of illiterate adults in the United States have not been successful. Consequently, many educators have expressed the desire to determine whether illiterate adults might be more successfully taught to read by using instructional, supplemental, and recreational reading materials concerning their preferred interests.

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[a]Reprints and sample lesson formats may be requested from Dr. Hutchison, College of Education, University of Houston, Houston, Texas, 77004.

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Varnado (1967) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of interest-oriented materials and methods in adult basic education classes. Her major finding indicated that subjects taught using such materials scored significantly higher on a post-test than did the control group, who were taught using traditional materials and methods. Other educators (Asheim, 1956; Cox, 1966; Berke, 1967; and Schnell, 1973) have also found hypothetical proof that adds theoretical credibility to this finding.

PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The present study was developed to determine whether lessons designed to emphasize preferred interests would improve functionally illiterate adult's information skills and interpretation of word meanings in context following silent reading. (It should be noted that the investigator assessed only silent reading skills because adults usually do not have the desire or need to read orally). Thus, this study tested the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the silent reading comprehension of functionally illiterate adults assigned interest-oriented reading materials and the comprehension of those not receiving this type of instruction. This study attempted, then, to answer the following question: Will functionally illiterate adults who silently read personally interesting reading materials more successfully recall and interpret content than adults who do not utilize this type of instructional reading material? Thus, the study's experimental group was administered a series of thirty such interest-directed lessons, while a suitable control group received a series of thirty lessons not designed to emphasize preferred interests.

THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Subjects

Twenty functionally illiterate adults attending an urban adult education center were used as subjects. These students met the following

criteria: (1) On the silent reading sub-test of the Standard Reading Inventory, Form A, used as a pre-test, all the subjects had scored lower than 4.0 grade level; and, (2) All the subjects had been previously classified by teachers as reading below 4.0 grade level. Furthermore, this group was made up of adults with a variety of interest preferences, which were emphasized in this portion of the study but were not a factor concerning the control group. The experimental group's interest preferences and the number of adults preferring each category are as follows: Sports, 7; Banking, 2; Bible Reading, 7; Children's Books, 2; and, Black Studies, 2.

Instructional Procedure

The instructional sessions for the experimental group occurred over a fifteen-week period with classes on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from six o'clock to eight o'clock. Each instructional session, which was conducted by an employed teacher included a ten-minute supplementary reading discussion segment, a thirty-minute direct-teach segment, a twenty-minute skill practice segment, a twenty-minute skill application segment, a twenty-minute supplementary reading selection segment, and a twenty-minute snack/recreational segment.

The direct-teach segment involved individualized instruction conducted by the group's regular teacher. When introducing the skills, the teacher emphasized the ones needed to master each specific lesson. Word attack, sight word, and comprehension skills were greatly stressed during this period. During the skill practice segment, each student used duplicated worksheets which were printed with primary type and which emphasized skills introduced during the direct-teach segment. The worksheets also accented skills to be utilized during the skill application segment, which stressed the skills introduced during the direct-teach and the skill practice segments. These skills were to be used by the student in comprehending a short story written

especially for his individual reading/learning preference. After reading his story silently, each student completed a brief worksheet that related to his story and that was designed to measure his reading comprehension. The supplementary reading segment of the lesson permitted each student to select out-of-class reading materials to be read at the student's diagnosed independent reading level. These materials were discussed at the next class.

Post-Test

At the end of the fifteen-week sessions, Form B of the Standard Reading Inventory was administered to the twenty experimental group subjects.

THE CONTROL GROUP

Subjects

Twenty functionally illiterate adults attending an urban adult education center were used as control group subjects. These students met the same criteria as those in the experimental group. However, this portion of the study did not emphasize the subjects' interest preferences.

Instructional Procedure

The instructional sessions for the control group occurred concurrently with those sessions of the experimental group. Classes met on Monday and Wednesday evenings from six o'clock to eight o'clock. The instructional sessions for this group, which were conducted by an employed teacher, were not segmented as were those for the experimental group. Instruction for the control subjects occurred in a large group arrangement that utilized commercially prepared instructional workbooks and kits.

Post-Test

At the end of the fifteen-week sessions, Form B of the Standard Reading Inventory was administered to the twenty control group subjects.

TREATMENT OF THE DATA

This study utilized a non-equivalent control group research design and analysis of covariance was the statistical treatment applied to the data collected. Scores on the Standard Reading Inventory, Form A, served as the criteria during the pre-test (scores in the silent reading sub-test were evaluated more critically than were scores on the vocabulary and oral reading sub-tests). The instructional treatment for students in the experimental group served as the independent variable. The scores on the Standard Reading Inventory, Form B, (silent reading sub-test), served as the criteria during the post-test. The F-ratio, derived from the analysis of variance, was used to test the proposed non-difference between the means of the scores of the experimental group and those of the control group. The .05 level of confidence was designated as the standard of significance.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Question: Will functionally illiterate adults who silently read personally interesting reading materials more successfully recall and interpret content than adults who do not utilize this type of instructional reading material?

The students in the experimental group were compared to those in the control group on the basis of their silent reading comprehension both before and after experiencing different instructional procedures. The pre-test and the post-test emphasized individual assessment of (a) the ability to recall information after silent reading and (b) the ability to interpret word meanings in context after silent reading.

Table 1

Silent Reading Grade Level Pre-Test Means and Post-Test Adjusted Means

	Pre-Test Mean (Covariant)	Post-Test Adjusted Mean (Criterion)
Experimental Group	2.35294	5.31081
Control Group	2.64706	3.68919

Table 1 indicates a contrast of pre-test means and post-test means for the experimental group and the control group.

Table 2

Summary of Silent Reading Comprehension Grade Level Means

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between Groups	21.62162	1	21.62162	17.64873*
Covariant	37.55103	1	37.55103	30.65118
Error	37.97838	31	1.22511	

*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

As Table 2 indicates, using analysis of variance to assess the differring amounts of change in the two groups, the computed F-ratio of 17.64873 is greater than the tabled F-value of 4.18 for 1 and 31 degrees of freedom. Since the difference is significant at the .05 level of confidence, it may be concluded that students who utilized interest-oriented materials recalled information and interpreted word meanings in context better than did those students using materials specifically designed or selected according to their preferred reading/learning interests.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether lessons designed to emphasize preferred interests would improve functionally illiterate adults' information recall skills and interpretation of word meanings in context following silent reading. It was found that the silent reading comprehension of students receiving specially prepared interest-oriented instructional reading materials was superior to the comprehension of those students not receiving such materials. While this in itself is not a surprising finding, it should be mentioned that pre-experimentally, it had been determined by the investigator that all adults were able to generate meaning when they read silently. Thus, with regard to silent reading comprehension, the adults in both subject groups were similar pre-experimentally. It appears then that the students receiving special instructional materials were able to process the comprehension questions on the silent reading sub-test of the Standard Reading Inventory, Form B, at a rate faster than that of the control subjects.

Implication

A practical implication of this study involves a need for providing instructional materials that stimulate and motivate functionally illiterate adults to react positively to instruction designed to consider their learning needs.

From a methodological point of view, a much stronger case for the effectiveness of such specialized instruction could be made with a longitudinal study that involved a larger population of functionally illiterate adults. However, despite the fact that the present study was not longitudinal, it is undeniably evident in the results of this investigation that instructional strategies based upon the preferred interests of adults classified as function-

ally illiterate did result in improving silent reading comprehension scores. Additionally, the students receiving special instructional materials attended class significantly more regularly than did the adults in the control group. Parenthetically, the mean attendance for students in the experimental group was 28.25 while that for the students in the control group was 20.70. Whether those scores are the result of the particular strategies employed, or whether those strategies produced increased attendance which made greater achievement possible can be debated and resolved through further research.

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